

## **Subud In Practice: Its Organisation**

As the years went by I began to discover that I was not alone in feeling an allegiance to the latihan that I could not feel towards the organisation called Subud. In short, I was soon to learn that very many of us ended up by thinking that the focus in Subud had shifted from the individual's own experiences of the latihan to promulgating the status of the man Bapak and the beliefs he held and which he consistently promoted in his many, many talks to Subud members.

Bapak has organised Subud so that:

There is a sharp distinction between the material and spiritual aspects of life. Committees of Chairpersons, treasurers and secretaries run the administrative side and there is a similar Helper structure for the spiritual side. (Group, Regional, National and International committees and helpers)

The result of this separation is that it can too easily lead to a simplistic approach whereby thinking, feeling etc. are to be limited, as Bapak says, to the material side of life only so that it is O.K. to think about finances and buildings and other such worldly things but thinking about ANYTHING else is discouraged. I wondered if that was the main reason why Subud folk are so reticent about the latihan or any of those deeper philosophical and psychological issues of meaning and purpose etc. that have occupied some of the best human minds that have ever lived? It may also have led to that curious Subud phenomenon whereby some Subud helpers attend committee meetings but only contribute with "spiritual quiet" and "testing" and some committee members, no matter how experienced they might be in the latihan, will ONLY talk about worldly concerns, leaving anything else to the helpers!

### *Enterprises*

Another result of this separation and encouragement to keep the mind harmlessly busy by occupying it with only "worldly things" is an emphasis on making money through what are called "enterprises". True, the money is to be partly used for charitable purposes and for helping the Subud organisation to own its own halls etc. Most of these have failed and some have failed spectacularly with varying degrees of hardship. They were obviously very dear to Bapak who talked about

them in every talk he gave, I think. As yet, his “vision” has not been implemented. I would have thought the example of the early Quakers was all that was really needed here! In other words it has already been done but, by and large, not by Subud members.

### *Latihans*

There are two group latihan nights and each latihan will last “approximately” half an hour. I experienced a number of helpers (not by any means all) who interpreted this to mean no more or less than *exactly* 30 minutes and so called for an end to the latihan whether you had finished or were still in full flow. That always felt to me like “latihan interruptus.” I also noticed that this bit of Bapak’s advice (to have 3 latihans a week: ie 2 group ones and 1 alone) was the bit that many helpers and members did *not* follow! They could be quite strict about urging others to follow Bapak’s advice about all sorts of things but all too often they themselves did not follow this bit! I wondered why that was?

### *Men And Women*

There is also a fixed separation between men and women, so that not only will they always latihan separately but there is also a clear “Subud view” of men and women, coming, of course from Bapak – that men, for example, are the “spiritual leaders” and women are some sort of spiritual “vessels”! This is an area of Subud which is abhorrent to an increasing number of Western people (and, I am told elsewhere in the world, too). Why, until very recently women were still being given a “form” to fill in, before they could join, on which they were asked if they had been given permission to join Subud by their husbands. Husbands, on the other hand, were not asked for their wife’s permission! My partner refused to have anything to do with this form. Apparently, there had been some talk amongst the helpers over several months about the form and eventually the National helpers tested about it: they received that the form should **not** be changed. However, a phone call to the Equalities Commission showed that the form was in opposition to “the spirit, at least, of equal opportunities legislation and was possibly illegal...” It was this I think that led to the form then being changed and, I believe, it is now more acceptable to the western view, although I have still come across Subud helpers who refuse to agree to this because “it is not what Bapak has said.”

The silliest example of the nonsense of this kind of thinking was clearly shown when I went to one of Bapak's talks and for some incomprehensible reason the organisers had taken it into their heads to sit the women on one side of the hall only and men on the other! I have never in my life seen anything like it – it just looked so odd! It might not have done in somewhere like Indonesia but here in London?! And, of course, it was infuriating to some married couples who expected to sit together to be told that is not how Bapak liked it (I cannot believe that was ever true). Anyway, a couple near to me overcame this by getting to sit together in the middle of the hall at the point where the women's line joined the men's! To be fair, I only saw this happen once in all the many mixed meetings I have been to. But where could such misunderstanding come from if not from a traditional, cultural (Eastern) view of "men" and "women" and from a clear uncritical wish to do what it was thought Bapak wanted, irrespective of the wishes of anyone else?

I shudder to mention Bapak's views on menstruation which still means that many, perhaps all, Subud women do not latihan at all at that time of the month. Could it really be a "purification of the blood" as my Helper's Handbook says without a shred of medical or scientific evidence to support it?

Of all the things that Bapak has said this area seems most obviously to me one that comes most certainly from Bapak's own culture, rather than from some new or Inner revelation of the "roles" of man and women. Subud here looks to me to be completely out of touch with what is happening, first, in the Western world and now beyond ... That does not, of course, mean that Subud is wrong (although many of us clearly think it is!) but it does mean that it, has a belief-system that isolates it from a large part of the world: people, that is who find such views so repulsive and backward-looking (being based on old culture rather than modern thinking) that they simply can have nothing to do with it. This shows quite clearly to me what happened when Subud got involved in Bapak's *ideas* etc. rather than just sticking to the exercise of the Latihan and being more concerned with the experience of the latihan. I personally wish, too, that there was more encouragement for explanations other than Bapak's to be considered more in Subud. Subud's publications, and members by and large, bother only with Bapak's and this makes Subud appear very narrow and ill-informed about what is going on in the rest of the world. The exciting work going on in Western science and in research, generally, appears to be of no interest whatsoever to Subud people who

are content it seems to let Bapak do their thinking and talking for them, believing it to be always something akin to “divine guidance” rather than cultural conditioning. Oh dear!